

The Adventures of Barb Wheeler by YumKiwiDelicious

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Summary: glimpses into the life of Barb, the daughter of Nancy, Jonathan, and Steve

1. Morning, Morning

It was morning, but not *morning* morning. The bed was a tangle of too long limbs and bony little knees, but Nancy Wheeler sighed contentedly and snuggled down deeper into the dog pile they made up. Steve was against her back, sharp nosed pressed to the nape of her neck, with an arm slung over her waist so he could rest a hand on Barb. The little girl was tucked close to her mother's chest with one stubby fingered hand raised to rest over the woman's cheek, stroking the spot softly as she dreamed. Behind her, curled in like a bear around its cub, was Jonathan breathing so deep that it was clear he wouldn't be waking up anytime soon. He held Nancy's hand loosely where it hung over Barb's back and their little family snoozed soundly as the sun began to rise higher outside.

Saturday was their day to sleep in, but Nancy liked waking up early if only to enjoy the peace and quiet that was so rare in their household. She blinked sleep out of her eyes and stretched as minimally as she could, not wanting to wake any of the others in the bed. They were all exhausted from staying up late after Barb had begged to watch *The Goonies* for possibly the millionth time. Steve had grumbled about it with no real bite as he blamed Jonathan for their daughter's somewhat dated taste in films. *The Goonies* had come out a whole two years before Barbara was even born and yet she preferred it to more recent films like *Home Alone* or *The Adams Family*. Jonathan had stated he was all for their kid having a thing for the classics while Nancy insisted they needed to start showing her movies actually meant for children.

She cleared her throat lightly, shifting over to give Steve more space as he rolled away from her and onto his back. He would be waking up soon, she could tell from his starfish like body language. She rolled onto her back as well, sending Barb's hand slipping down to her collar, and rested her neck over the young man's arm as his breathing slowly changed, hiccuping and sighing as he started to come to.

"Morning," she whispered at the first sign of his eyes fluttering open. She could tell from the way his brow and nose scrunched up that he

was groaning somewhere deep down in his chest; suffering in silence so that he didn't wake Barb and Jon. "It's still early."

Rather than responding Steve rolled back onto his side, quickly propping himself to get a glimpse of Barb over Nancy's shoulder. Seeing her still asleep he dropped a kiss to Nancy's cheek before dropping his head to her chest, fluffy, bed-wild hair tickling at her nostrils.

"We gotta start putting her to bed earlier," he complained in a whisper, voice vibrating through the both of them. Nancy hummed an agreement. "I'm gonna start putting my foot down about the late night movie sessions."

His woman snorted beneath him and he grumbled that he was serious, but they both knew it would be an uphill battle. Of the three adults in the house, Steve was the most lenient when it came to Barb. Shameful as it was for him to admit, he was a big pushover for her large eyes and pouting face when she wanted something. While Nancy and Jonathan took turns being the 'bad guy' Steve let their daughter get away with everything just short of murder. The girl ran around hollering like a banshee, missed school for the most miniscule of reasons, and got an unprecedented amount of sweets before supper time. There was simply no way he'd be able to swing cutting her Friday movie nights short; he didn't have the heart.

He was mumbling a sort of gameplan about breaking the bad news to the little girl when they both turned at a breathy sigh from the center of the bed. Barbara Wheeler yawned and stretched, throwing her limbs about carelessly as she woke from her slumber. Jonathan managed to sleep through the tiny fist thumping into his forehead, but Steve visibly winced as a little foot caught him in the exposed shin. The girl didn't seem to notice as she rubbed her eyes open and took stock of the situation for the morning. She beamed when she caught Nancy and Steve looking at her.

"Hi, mommy," she yawned, rolling forward to catch her mother around the neck in a sleepy hug, her hands getting tangled in the woman's hair.

Nancy hugged her back and wished her good morning before rolling

and passing her off Steve. Jonathan still slept at her back, though he'd shifted when Barb was pulled away. "What do you want for breakfast?"

Barbara hummed exaggeratedly in thought, snuggling back into her papa's hold as Steve attempted to smooth down her curls with the hand that wasn't hugging her. They both had very bad bed head in the mornings. The child's amber eyes bounced around the ceiling, her tongue just barely sticking out of her mouth as she tried to figure out what she was hungry for. Nancy waited patiently, momentarily wondering if the girl would drop off to sleep again, before her daughter gasped and her whole face lit up.

"Can we have brownies for breakfast?!" she gushed loudly, only quieting down when her two parents shushed her with a reminder that her third parent was still sleeping. "Can we please, Mommy?"

Nancy huffed through her nose, ready to start the day off with her only child being upset with her, when suddenly she had an idea. Glancing over she saw Steve looking as if he were about to settle in for more sleep until Nance called them all to the table and she smiled wickedly. The young man frowned at her, mouthing a soft 'what?', as she turned back to Barb who was still beaming at her hopefully.

"Ask your papa," she advised smoothly, just barely getting a glimpse of Steve's betrayed look before Barb set upon him. She climbed onto his chest, bony knees digging into his chest as she begged to have dessert for breakfast for once.

"Oh, please, please, please, Papa, can we have brownies for breakfast? That would be the best thing ever!"

Steve looked like he was in physical pain as he frowned up at his little girl looking so bright eyed and bushy tailed. Of the three adults in the house, Steve was the most anal when it came to Barb's diet. All food groups had to be present in healthy amounts, every meal had to be cooked at home, and besides the goodies he snuck her before dinner she really wasn't supposed to have that much sugar. He looked as if he were gazing forward into the future and seeing all her upcoming cavities as he began to crumble to her will. Nancy would have laughed if it wasn't so pathetic.

"Fine," he grouched at last, turning away and grunting as Barb gave an excited bounce right on his stomach, "Brownies it is."

Nancy shook her head in mock disappointment, stifling a snicker as Steve covertly shot her the bird as he threw himself out of bed. Barb clambered over for one more kiss from her mommy before following, bouncing on the balls of her feet as she followed her papa out the room and down the hall, chattering in an excited whisper the whole time about how happy daddy would be to wake up to brownies. The young woman smiled warmly to herself, not knowing if she could love those two any more, as she layed back down and let her eyes flutter closed. A sharp inhale of breath to her left had her cracking her eyes back open not a moment later, however, and she twisted her neck around to get a look at Jonathan. He was flat on his belly now, his personal wake up tell, and smacking his lips tiredly.

"Time?" he rasped, not bothering to open his eyes as Nancy scooted closer. He rolled to his side just barely to allow her space to snuggle under him before relaxing again.

"Early," she informed, bringing a hand up to card through his dark hair, scratching lightly at his scalp.

He inhaled deeply again, taking in her scent, and cleared his throat. "Oh."

Nance smirked at how articulate he was in the morning before pressing a quick kiss to his shoulder. "Go back to sleep," she hushed, "Steve's making brownies for breakfast with Barb."

The young man guffawed a short laugh, sniffing lightly as he kept his eyes closed and got even more comfortable. "God, he is such a pushover," he murmured good-naturedly, dropping off to sleep between one breath and the next. Nany hummed her agreement, feeling herself relax back into slumber as she listened to Barb and Steve singing in the kitchen. They would either wake her when the brownies were done, or she'd wake up on her own to a burnt pan. But that wouldn't be until morning. Morning morning.

2. Her Other Father

Jonathan huffed as he slumped down further in the uncomfortable plastic chair. Off to his right Barb sat kicking her feet back and forth and adamantly avoiding his gaze every time he tried to catch her eye. The woman at the desk a few feet away paid them absolutely no mind, typing away on her computer, glasses sat primly on the edge of her nose. She wasn't the same woman that had acted as secretary when Jonathan had been Barb's age, but they could have been twins. He wondered if there was a certain sort of physical check-list you had to meet when applying for the job. Not that he knew or wanted to know anyone interested in becoming an elementary school secretary. Who would want to spend more time than they had to in a place like this?

"Mr. Murphy will see you now."

The only other two people in the office jumped as the thin woman spoke up robotically, not removing her eyes from the glare of her screen as she motioned with one hand towards the second door in the room. She hadn't gotten a call and Jonathan hadn't seen anyone nod through the office window, but he took her word for it, nodding his thanks as he took to his feet and motioned Barb to follow him.

"Ah, Mr. Wheeler, pleasure to finally meet you. I'm used to seeing Mrs. Wheeler at these meetings."

The principal of Barb's school was a man not unlike the actual Mister Wheeler. He was average height, average build, with an average haircut, and was all around just...average. He rose minimally from his seat to reach across his pristine desk and offer Jonathan a handshake. He accepted and rated it average just like everything else while giving his apologies about having work during most school functions. The man waved him off good-naturedly, stating that he understood completely. Jonathan tried not to sigh because it was good of him to excuse Jon's frankly glaring absence from his daughter's school activities, but he didn't enjoy that the man seemed to think he got a free pass simply because he worked. Nancy worked too.

"It's actually Jonathan Byers," he correct gruffly rather than voicing

his thoughts, not missing the way the man's eyebrows rose and he chortled lowly to himself as they all were seated. Barb hopped into his lap.

"I see," Mr. Murphy huffed, "Why buy the cow when you can get the milk for free, eh?" Jonathan didn't laugh at his joke and the principal cleared his throat loudly before looking down at a sheet of paper scrawled across messily with chicken scratch handwriting. "Yes, we did have some trouble today, it says here, during mathematics."

Barb peeked over her shoulder at Jonathan, her messy curls not hiding the faint blush over her cheeks as she fidgeted under his disapproving glance.

"Yes?"

"It seems during class today Barbara told another student to 'piss off.'"

Jonathan's eyebrows shot up in confusion and he completely missed the other man's recount of the event as he racked his brain for where his little girl could have learned such a phrase. Nancy hadn't sworn in ages and Jonathan never did so within her hearing range...

It hit him like a slap to the face and he sighed, rubbing a palm roughly over his eyes as he subtly pinched his daughter's side. She jumped with a small squeak before settling down again.

"Jesus, I'm sorry," he assured, pinning the man across from him with a sincere look over Barb's head. "She gets that from her father."

The man's totally average smile tweaked at the edges a bit, clearly being restrained from frowning in confusion. He nodded slowly, as if trying to buy himself time, while reaching for a bottom drawer behind his desk. Jonathan assumed it was where more files were kept.

"But I thought..." he began, scanning over a folder he had pulled into his lap, out of site. He glanced up at Jonathan. "Aren't you her father?"

Jonathan snorted, pushing Barb lightly from his knees so he could move to stand again. The principal looked like he was short circuiting

internally as he kept glancing down into the file and the array of names printed there.

"Well, yeah," Jon conceded, feeling a tiny hand slide into his own as he nodded to convey his move towards the exit, "Obviously I'm talking about her other father."

He called a good day to the principal and even the secretary as he rushed back out into the hall, suddenly feeling very keen to hurry and get home so that he could have a talk with Steve. He glanced down at Barb who hummed a small tune to herself, nose upturned at him and small lips curved into a smile. He scoffed at her.

"Don't look so happy," he warned, swooping down to lift her to his hip without breaking stride. She was still small. "Mommy and Papa are not gonna be happy to hear about this one."

She pouted dejectedly going on to state that her papa had told her to use the phrase if the boy that sat next to her in class continued to tug on her hair. Jonathan huffed, agreeing with Steve's logic on paper, but not in practice. The two chattered about the incident back and forth all the walk to the car and on the car ride home. Jonathan eventually agreed that she was right in sticking up for herself, but not in using bad language. When they reached their not so average home, the little girl dashed out of the car, up the front porch and right into the house where she was greeted by Nancy looking frazzled from work but dazzling all the same.

When the young mother questioned her lover as to why the two were late coming home, he explained the issue at the school and how a teacher had caught him by the sleeve right as they were making their escape at pick-up time. He concluded the story with his words to Principal Murphy just as Steve joined them from upstairs, immediately attacking Barb in a barrage of noisy kisses that had the girl shrieking with laughter. Nancy cooed to her other lover he would be hearing from her about Barb's language later and retreated into the kitchen to get dinner started. The two men watched her go, Barb eventually fussing to be put down so she could follow. Once the two women were out of the room Steve turned to Jonathan with a glaring pout.

"Why do you always have to blame me?"

3. From the Mouths of Babes

"Why can't we have Thanksgiving at our house?"

Nancy sighed warmly, sloshing water on the side of the tub as she finished lathering the shampoo into her daughter's hair. To save on time they were taking a bath together before they had to rush to Jonathan's childhood home to help finish preparing dinner. Barb's hair was fluffy with suds as was Nancy's and the two Wheeler women were just about ready to hop out.

"Because we don't have enough rooms for grandma and grandpa, Aunt Eleven, and *both* your uncles to spend the night," she explained before guiding her daughter to lean her head back to have water poured over it. She reached for the comb as Barb huffed, face scrunched up in thought.

"We could all have a sleepover in the living room!" the little girl enthused, causing more water to splash up as she wiggled with excitement.

Nancy snorted a short laugh imagining her whole mixed matched family attempting to camp out in their tiny living room. Barb squished between Steve and Jonathan on the floor while Nancy and Joyce shared the couch. Will, Mike, and Eleven building a childish fort between the wall and the armchair where Jim would stay propped up and snoring all night. It'd be cramped, cozy chaos.

"Maybe next year, hon," the young mother hummed, continuing to comb out her child's tangled curls.

Barbara went back to splashing around in the water, dunking and diving her one bath toy, a knight shaped figurine from Will, while creating the dramatic sounds of an aquatic battle complete with explosions and pained cries. Nancy listened intently, working out knots from bottom to top as Barb's knight faced perilous extremes towards the front of the tub. She could hear Steve and Jonathan bickering lightly in the kitchen about when exactly they were meant to take out the sheet of cookies Nancy had set to bake before preparing their bath. It was an old recipe of her mother's and if not

timed perfectly the whole batch would be ruined.

She dumped more water over Barb's hair and made her giggle. The girl's curls were battling against the weight of the water, trying to bounce back up to their usual volume. Nancy had a sneaking suspicion who she got those ringlets from, but never so pressing that she investigated it any further than staring intently. Anyone that thought to comment on the girl's resemblance to either Jonathan or Steve was usually immediately driven to apologize when the girl pointed out that she looked like *both* her daddies. Which she did. She looked like her mother too.

"Mommy?"

"Mhm?"

"How come I only have one grandma and one grandpa?"

Nancy's fingers froze at the crown of her daughters head where they were attempting to part her wild curls down the middle. The battle towards the front of the tub had finally reached its end, the knight sinking into a watery grave as Barb blinked down on him.

"What do you mean, honey?"

The water swirled in a vortex as Barbara Wheeler spun around to face her mother in the tub, wayward drops splashing up into both their faces. Her face was pink from being scrubbed clean at the start of the bath and her eyelashes clung together with droplets of water falling off. Nancy blinked down on her.

"Tessa Hargrove says she has two grandmas and grandpas," she informed, "Because her mommy has a mommy and daddy and her daddy has a mommy and daddy. But only daddy has a mommy and daddy."

To anyone else it would have sounded like a jumble of nonsense from the mouths of babes, but Nancy caught the jist of what her daughter was trying to say. She wanted to know why her and Steve's parents were not in the picture even though Nana Joyce and Pop-Pop Hopper were around all the time. The young woman blew a breath out

through her lips, eyes comically wide for the girl's benefit as she processed the inquiry.

Her and Steve never spoke about their parents anymore. Never spoke to their parents anymore. Never saw their parents anymore. As soon as the Wheelers had found out Nancy was pregnant out of wedlock they had disowned her, blocking her entrance to their home and cutting her off from her brother. It wasn't until Mike was 18 and legally able to communicate with whoever he wanted that he had come by and met his niece and hugged his sister for the first time in years.

Similarly when the Harringtons had found out that Steve was going to stick around to raise a child that he only might have fathered, along side the man who was the other suspect, all out of wedlock, they quickly shut him out of their lives. Unlike Nancy's parents they also moved away for good measure, not wanting their son's proclivities to tarnish their good name anymore than he already had after he'd started carrying on with the rumoured loose Nancy Wheeler and That Byers Boy.

Only Joyce had stuck around. Only Joyce had listened as three teenagers on the very cusp of adulthood had sat down and told her they were going to raise a baby together. That they were all together. Nancy, Steve, Jonathan, all them, were together and in love and were expecting a baby and wanted her to know. She'd cried, but they were happy tears. She'd swept Nancy into her arms and then pulled her son in as well. When she'd spotted Steve hovering on the edge of oblivion she'd nearly bit his head off to join the huddle, crying that she now had three sons.

With Joyce came Will and Hopper and with Hopper came Eleven and those had been the only people in their lives for a long time. The only people that gave them a place to stay when they were young and broke. The only people that planned and attended Nancy's baby shower. The only people sitting in the uncomfy hospital waiting room chairs to hear the news that Barbara Joyce Wheeler had entered the world. When Mike turned 18 their family got a little bigger, but that was it. They had never needed anyone else, never reached out to anyone else. Mike seemed to be giving their parents the cold shoulder until they spoke to Nancy and Steve's parents hadn't left him so much

as a forwarding address.

It had never occurred to Nancy to explain any of this to her child since Barbara certainly was not lacking love in her life, but she had also never examined the thought that it may one day just come up on its own. After all other people's family situations met the status quo even if hers did not and the status quo called for more than one set of grandparents according to Tessa Hargrove. Nancy made a mental note to phone Billy one of these days to give him a piece of her mind,

"Well, honey," she began slowly, Barb's eyes trained on her, the bath water growing frigid, "You know how daddy and Grandma Joyce are very close?"

"Daddy's best friend is Grandma Joyce," Barb beamed, clasped hands breaching the surface of the tub water before splashing back down again.

Nancy frowned good naturedly and nodded. Around the time she was entering first grade Barbara had become unusually fixated on the idea of 'best friends'. She'd proclaimed that each person could only have one and that that one person would remain their best friend forever and ever. With such guidelines she'd been particularly vexed when her mother had stated her best friends were her daddies and had refused to pick a favorite. Steve had similarly announced that both of his partners were his best friends, telling her the rule of only having one wasn't true. Only Jonathan had met expectations and promptly answered that his own mother was his best friend which matched with how close he and Joyce had become during the pregnancy and beyond.

If Barb was hurt that none of her parents had declared her their best friend she hid it with all the grace and dignity of someone far older than her.

"Yes, well," Nancy went on, "Me and your papa aren't...friends with your other grandmas and grandpas." She eyed her daughter, seeing if this news would be taken poorly. Barb just stared at her. "We don't agree on a lot of things so we decided that...maybe one grandma and grandpa is enough?"

Her absolutely abysmal speech ended on an upward inflection, as if she were asking the little girl if they'd made the right choice in cutting her off from nearly half of her extended family. The decision, though honestly made completely without them, had torn Steve and Nancy up for a lot of years where only the Byers had been there to comfort them. Their unwavering presence and support had made the absence of the Harringtons and Wheelers seem far less daunting over time and if Nancy were to be honest it had been years since she'd had a passing thought of her parents unless Mike made an offhand comment on something they were up to. It had never occurred to her that her daughter may notice and suffer their absence.

If Barb was suffering from the absence of the four adults that had decided she was an abomination and disgrace to their good names before she was even born she hid it with all the grace and dignity of someone far older than her.

She merely gave a contented little 'oh' before turning back to the front of the tub, her knight resurrecting himself from the watery depths. Her mother watched her resume her play seeming completely unaffected by the news and wondered if she would always stay this uncaring and aloof about the people that would scorn her very existence.

"They are."

"What, honey?" Nancy asked, having gotten lost in her thoughts as Barb splashed about near the spout. In that second she'd had a flash forward to Barb as a teen with wild hair and hard opinions and three parents. The little girl glanced very briefly around her wayward curls at her mother, possibly checking that she actually had her attention this time.

"Grandma Joyce and Popper are enough," she clarified, her common bumbling of Hopper's honorific falling like water droplets into the tub. "I only want people around that make you and Papa happy."

From the mouths of babes.

Nancy was right in the middle of blinking back a sudden onset of tears when Steve barged into the bathroom, the door never having

been closed in the first place. His hands were rubbing together likely in an attempt to keep them out of his hair which was already standing on edge from being yanked on. The too sweet smile on his face let Nancy know right away that he and Jonathan had ruined the cookies. She shot him a watery grin.

"We about ready to go?" he asked, plastering an excited grin on his face as Barb immediately hopped up to greet him, bowling water up over the edge of the tub to the tiled floor below. "There's my girl!"

"Papa!" she crowed, arms out and knight forgotten at the bottom of the tub as Steve grabbed a towel to wrap her up in. "Mommy said next Thanksgiving we can have a big sleepover in the living room!"

Nancy sputtered as her only child was lifted up out of the tub and Steve looked at her like that cat that had got the canary. She was stunned Barbara could completely nix the larger part of the conversation to focus on the only part that had really mattered to her to begin with. She had no clue the gravity her question had brought to her mother's heart.

"Did she?" Steve crooned, holding their sopping wet daughter on his hip and trying in vain to run the towel over her hair, "That does sound pretty fun."

Barb agreed whole heartily and set to talking her father's ear off as he carried her out of the bathroom towards her room to get dressed. Her bubbly voice drifted down the hallway and Nancy could only huff out a bemused laugh as she settled down in the tepid water. Her eyes had barely drifted shut to focus her senses on Barb's fading voice when there was a knock on the door frame. Jonathan was leaning there, smiling warmly at her as was his habit and she returned the gesture readily.

"Ready to go?" he probed gently, not wanting to drag her from a moment he could see was one of great peace. Nancy sighed happily and reached for the plug.

"Yep.